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Book -L 34

A D D R E S S

TO

..

HIS EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT GRANT

OF

COL. RICHARD LATHERS,

CHAIRMAN OF A COMMITTEE

OF THE

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

OF

CHARLESTON, S. C.,

APPOINTED TO COÖPERATE WITH THE COMMITTEE ENTRUSTED
WITH THE DUTY OF PRESENTING TO THE PRESIDENT
AND TO CONGRESS THE MEMORIAL OF
THE TAX-PAYERS' CONVENTION
OF SOUTH CAROLINA.

Charleston, S. C.

The News and Courier Job Presses.

1874.

COMMITTEE.

RICHARD LATHERS, Chairman.

G. A. TRENHOLM.

LOUIS D. DESAUSSURE.

HENRY GOURDIN.

JAMES SIMMONS.

WILLIAM AIKEN.

S. Y. TUPPER.

A D D R E S S .

Mr. President: We represent the Chamber of Commerce, of Charleston, S. C., one of the oldest commercial bodies in the Union, originating in 1784, under the Presidency of Commodore Gillon, whose gallantry during the Revolution, in capturing three English Frigates off the Bar of Charleston, while commanding a single vessel, and other naval feats of skill and bravery, which you have no doubt often recalled with pride in the early history of our Navy, and whose shade, could it be permitted to look down on our present sufferings, would revolt at the hard conditions to which his descendents in the State are now subjected. We have been appointed as a delegation to co-operate with a like body of leading citizens of the State in the presentation of a MEMORIAL TO CONGRESS OF THE TAXPAYERS' CONVENTION, and to lay our grievances before your Excellency, with a view to enlist your sympathy and support for the people of the State, who are now suffering by fraud and misrule, not the result of mere party domination, for there are no party issues of a political nature to divide our citizens, but we suffer by the despotism of a corrupt and ignorant faction, a body of adventurers who came into power by the connivance of the Freedmen's Bureau, and the corrupt use of public funds to procure their election, which funds Congress had set apart for maintaining the indigent and aged freedmen of the State, but which was used for the corruption of the colored race, as appears by the printed Congressional Report, No. 121, of the Second Session of the Forty-second Congress, of the Investigating Committee into the alleged frauds of General Howard: "It was offered to be proved that in South Carolina the Assistant Commissioner (Scott) had been elected Governor of that State by the corrupt use of rations, provisions,

and transportation; that, as an officer of the Bureau, and having control of this property, he, by and with the knowledge and connivance of Howard, did use such property to the extent of three hundred thousand dollars for this purpose. The names of witnesses, of high character, and members of the Republican party, were handed in, and subpoenas asked for them, by whom it was stated, by respectable persons, these facts could be substantiated. The majority of the Committee refused to allow them to be summoned."

Now, Mr. President, this fact only confirms your own fears as to the dangerous influence of the Freedman's Bureau, so clearly hinted at in your very thoughtful Report to President Johnson, in 1865, on your return from your Southern tour of military and civil observation; and I cannot refrain from quoting the greater part of that admirable paper, because it so justly and comprehensively describes public sentiment in South Carolina, and suggests such measures of liberal policy as were well calculated to insure public safety, and a happy reconstruction of the State into the Union; and had your advice been followed by Congress, we would have escaped the evils and scandal which the political action of the Freedmen's Bureau has entailed on this country:

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL GRANT'S REPORT.

"The following are the conclusions come to by me: I am satisfied that the mass of the thinking people of the South accept the present situation of affairs in good faith. The questions which have hitherto divided the sentiments of the people of the two sections, slavery and States Rights, or the right of a State to secede from the Union, they regard as having been settled by the highest tribunal (arms) that man can resort to. I was pleased to learn from the leading men whom I met, that they not only accepted the decision arrived at as final, but now that the smoke of battle was cleared away, and time has been given for reflection, that this decision has been a fortunate one for the whole country, they receiving the like benefits from it with those who opposed them in the field and in council. * * * *

The white and black mutually require the protection of the General Government. There is such universal acquiescence in the authority of the General Government throughout the portions of the country visited by me, that the mere presence of military force, without regard to numbers, is sufficient to maintain order.

The good of the country requires that the force kept in the interior, where there are many freedmen, (elsewhere in the Southern States than at forts, upon the seacoast, no force is necessary,) should be white troops. The reasons for this are obvious, without mentioning many of them. The presence of black troops, lately slaves, demoralizes labor, *both by their advice* and furnishing in their camps a resort for the freedmen for long distances around. White troops generally excite no opposition, and therefore a small number of them can maintain order in a given district. Colored troops must be kept in bodies sufficient to defend themselves.

"It is not thinking men who would do violence towards any class of troops sent among them by the General Government, but the ignorant in some places might; and the late slave, too, who might be imbued with the idea that the property of his late master should, by right, belong to him, at least should have no protection from the colored soldier. My observations lead me to the conclusion that the citizens of the Southern States are anxious to return to self-government within the Union as soon as possible. I did not give the operations of the Freedmen's Bureau that attention I would have done if more time had been at my disposal. Conversations, however, on the subject with officers connected with the Bureau, led me to think that in some States its affairs have not been conducted with judgment or economy, and that the belief widely spread among the freedmen of the Southern States, that the lands of their former owners will, at least in part, be divided among them, *has come from the agents of this Bureau*. This belief is seriously interfering with the willingness of freedmen to make contracts for the coming year. *

* * * The Freedmen's Bureau being separated from the military establishment of the country, requires all the expense of a separate organization. One does not necessarily know what the other is doing, or what orders they are acting under. It seems so me this could be corrected by regarding every officer on duty with troops in the Southern States as agents of the Freedmen's Bureau, and then have all orders from the head of the Bureau sent through the department commanders. This would create a responsibility that would cause the orders and instructions from the head of the Bureau being carried out, and would relieve from duty and pay a large number of employees of the Government.

(Signed)

U. S. GRANT,
Lieutenant-General."

Now, Mr. President, you have here fully and fairly stated our case in South Carolina, and if our State had been kept under the

management of the officers of the army of the United States, and the Freedmen's Bureau had been subordinated to their honest direction and supervision, as you advised, instead of being used as a political engine for corrupting the freedmen, and for sowing dissension between the two races, our mission to-day to your Excellency might have been one of congratulation, instead of one for presenting grievances, and invoking commiseration and redress.

Confining itself strictly to the domains of Commerce, the Chamber which we represent rarely comes into personal relations with any of the distinguished men who have occupied the Presidential chair. President Washington visited our City in 1791, and received from the Chamber such hospitality and address of welcome as his distinguished patriotism and able administration merited; and the appointment of the delegation before you is, perhaps, the next most important event as connecting the Chamber with public measures. The reply of the Father of his Country to his fellow-citizens of Charleston, which I venture to quote to your Excellency, as marking the sympathy of a President of that day for a State now greatly needing such support, and which we have every confidence you will practically emulate. He writes:

"GENTLEMEN: Your congratulations, on my arrival in South Carolina, enhanced by the affectionate manner in which they are offered, are received with the most grateful sensibility. Flattered by the favorable sentiments you express of my endeavors to be useful to our country, I desire to assure you of my constant solicitude for its welfare, and of my particular satisfaction in observing the advantages which accrue to the highly deserving citizens of this State from the *operations of the General Government*. I am not the less indebted to your expressions of personal attachment and respect; they receive my best thanks, and induce my most sincere wishes for your professional prosperity and your individual happiness.

(Signed,)

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

Two of the gentlemen, here present, of our Delegation to your Excellency are the sons of merchants then representing the Chamber in doing honor to the first President of the United States, and their situation now, as citizens of a prostrate State, where robbery and misrule prevails, as compared with the South Caro-

lina of their fathers, whose place in the Union was then one of equality, respect, and influence, is well calculated to produce despondency as to the future of our Great Republic, and calls on you, sir, to apply such remedies as the great influence and power of your office clothes you with, to rescue the history of your administration from the foul charge which bad men have put upon it, and when you shall again visit our city, restored to the rights and privileges with which Washington congratulated the Chamber as enjoying, under the benign influence of the Federal Government, we shall be able to address you with the same words of veneration and esteem as were accorded the first President, and you will be equally ready to respond in the spirit of his language: "I desire to assure you of my constant solicitude for its welfare, and my particular satisfaction in observing the advantages which accrue to the highly deserving citizens of the State *from the operations of the General Government.*" Your great military fame, enhanced by your generous treatment of the vanquished at the close of our unfortunate civil war, and your liberal and manly report of the condition of the South, already referred to in my remarks, will be greatly illustrated and sustained by a firm civil administration, rebuking and putting down the frauds and misrule of a body of adventurers, who, under the garb of your supporters, are rapidly undermining your administration, impoverishing the people, and degrading the national reputation itself.

Under the reconstruction measures of Congress, manipulated by the carpet-baggers and the corruptions of the Freedmen's Bureau, an entire subversion of every conservative principle or practice of the State took place, and institutions, foreign to the habits of our people, were introduced and operated by strangers. Laws, usages, and the Courts themselves, were all changed, and venerated Judges, whose reputation for learning and probity gave our Courts at home and abroad an enviable reputation, were displaced, and a Code of laws were introduced from another State, wholly out of sympathy with our usages and comprehension, and Judges appointed in many cases who had not mastered the lowest rudiments of the law, and in whose integrity no one had confidence, and even Judges of our highest Court have not

escaped from open charges of corruption by members of the Legislature in their places during the session.

Criminals are discharged almost as fast as they are convicted, by pardons granted in consideration of political influence or services. Elections are held by managers, most of whom are candidates or active politicians, appointed by the Governor, and his immediate agents, no representative of an adverse party being conceded, and even the polls, in many cases, opened at unusual places, without notice. In our own city, at the last election, the oath requiring proof of citizenship was so modified by the partisan managers as to leave out that protection against illegal voting, and large numbers from the rural districts and the surrounding plantations were brought into the city and voted at polls not advertised, so that 1500 more votes were cast at one precinct than the whole number of inhabitants residing there. The registry law which the Constitution of the State requires, is wholly disregarded, because it would tend to restrain illegality; and in a recent appeal against an illegal election, the Judges declined to have the returns examined, or to receive testimony of voters that confessed they had voted illegally. Charleston, therefore, the great commercial mart of the State, and among the largest of the export cotton ports of the country, has not a single member in the Legislature representing the business interest and property of the city. The two Senators are colored men, and twelve of the eighteen in the Lower House are also colored; with few exceptions, this whole delegation are men of no business or occupation, except that of politics, and in no sense representing the business or useful industry of the city. And what is still worse, it is rare that a respectable colored man can get any appointment, and when the public are so favored, his removal is certain when he neglects or refuses to conform to the fraudulent practices of the party in power, or when a hungry white carpet-bagger covets his office for the emolument; but it must be conceded that offices of high military rank, without salaries, are freely conferred on ambitious colored men, as the frequent military parades fully attest, by the new uniforms. The effect of all this misrule and corruption is seen in the enormous taxation

which burthen the industry and commercial enterprise of our city, and drives away capital and population. The taxes in this city on Bank capital is nearly six per cent., so that the borrower has to add these taxes to the interest on his loan, and hence thirteen per cent. is the very lowest at which money can be had on the best security in the Banks, and of course money borrowed on less known securities, or of private lenders, are at greatly enhanced rates, thus crippling enterprise, and seriously interfering with trade and industry.

The report of the City Treasurer, just made public, shows that nearly one-third of the yearly taxation is in default, and subject of sale in the City, and I perceive that over 288,000 acres of land, and the buildings thereon, have been forfeited for taxes due the State for the year 1872, for the small aggregate sum of \$32,000, which is less than twelve cents per acre, which the impoverished owners have been unable to pay to save their property from confiscation. I know of a landed estate in the city, consisting of a good class of tenement houses, kept in fine order, and valued for taxation at \$100,000; the property is all rented at satisfactory rents, and yet, after paying taxes, and insurance, and such small repairs as tenants require, the owner has not realized one cent the past year for the capital invested. The house in which I live myself would not rent for the taxes and insurance, to say nothing of the capital invested in its value, and the necessary repairs to keep it in order.

The State authorities overthrew first the credit of the State by fraudulent issues of bonds, and then repudiate, not only their own issues, but also scale down to half their value that part of the bonds of their honest predecessors, for which the public creditor honestly parted with his money, and which the State has the full benefit of, by an honest application of the funds. Having exhausted their credit, and wasted the public funds, the Legislature are proceeding to spoliation, under the name of taxation.

So anxious were the Conservative people to have an honest administration of the affairs of the City of Charleston, and of the State, that no Democratic nominations have been made; but on the contrary, candidates of both colors from the Republican party

have received the support of Conservative men, in every election, on principles of financial reform; and yet, every election since the active political contests have ceased, seems to have brought into power in the State Government, with few exceptions, officials of more effrontery in their frauds and misrule than it was believed possible to obtain in any community, outside of a penitentiary. The few honorable exceptions, among which I would name most of our members of Congress, white and colored, and small minorities in the City and State Legislature, who are, however, so powerless as to be of no practical utility for reform, but, on the contrary, are in peril, because of their very exceptional honesty, of losing their positions at the next election; for every election in this State sacrifices a part of this honest minority, and reduces their number in proportion as their integrity becomes obvious to the corrupt ring which rules the State, by the manipulation of the ballot-boxes, and the appointment of the whole machinery of the election. Unless Congress applies the remedy by special election laws, and other measures of relief, and even then the use of money is to be feared in a State where members of the Legislature, in open session, accuses the judges of the highest court of receiving bribes for favorable decisions, and when legislation is openly sold for money, and no bill, however useful to the public interest, can be passed without payment of money for legislative action.

In view of these evils we ask your influence, sir, with the councils of the nation, and hope for a message to Congress, evincing the sympathy in our cause which we know you entertain. We feel confident that Congress will exercise the same power to correct the evils which we are constrained to say their reconstruction measures produced. The proposition cannot be controverted, that the power to make a law can certainly modify or abolish it; and while we freely concede that the reconstruction measures were intended only to protect the freedmen's rights, yet the most earnest in their cause now admit that the rights of white men, and their estates, have been too much sacrificed in the theory, and that, practically, both the interest of the white and colored citizens in this State have been made the victims of the rapacity of the corrupt carpet-baggers. But apart from all this, we rely on

the Constitutional power of Congress to guarantee to us a Republican form of government, not in name, but in fact, the substance of that which we hope for. If a shadow, as some contend, it must proceed from a substance, and must be *that* form which was in practical execution, and was contemplated by the Constitution when the States confederated to maintain the principle so essential to freedom. Hamilton, Madison, and even Calhoun, the great embodiment of the extreme doctrine of State rights, not only concede the power of Congress to reform evils in a State, under the fourth Article of the Constitution, but show conclusively that they anticipated our present situation as the proper application of that correctionary measure. The remedies are fully within the power of Congress, without the exercise of extreme or revolutionary measures. An amendment of the State Constitution to protect minorities and restrict the power of majorities, by the application of the *cumulative* system of voting, so successfully in force in England, and in many of our own States, will go far to protect the rights of property and persons against fraud and misrule, and yet preserve manhood or individual suffrage as fully as it now exists, to every class of citizens. Or, an amendment, by which members of the Senate of the State should be elected by taxpayers only, would protect the people from extravagant appropriations or fraudulent use of the public money, and conserve the public interest generally, especially if properly sustained by an effective registry law and a proper protection of the purity of the ballot-box, now utterly degraded to serve the purposes of those in power.

Mr. President, it appears to us that Congress must deal with this evil, and reform the work of reconstruction, and correct the malign influence of the Freedmen's Bureau, which you so clearly saw cropping out in its early history. The whole country, of every party and race, and, indeed, the whole world, are shocked and disgusted with the present rule in South Carolina. The safety and protection of the interests of the public creditors, as well as the oppressed property-holder, and the civilization and prosperity of the colored race itself, needs immediate active measures on the part of Congress to reform these abuses. The reputation of your administration is even at stake in this connection, because

these public robbers have succeeded in identifying themselves as your supporters, and justify their corrupt measures as in sympathy with your policy. They misrepresent our opposition to their frauds as rebellion towards the Government and opposition to your administration; whereas, the people of South Carolina are as loyal to the Government and laws of the United States as any people in this Union, and have had too hard a struggle for means to support their impoverished families to give any time to party issues. We therefore, sir, approach you as American citizens should approach the Chief Magistrate of our nation, not as partisans, but with that respect for your person and high office which justifies our confidence that your administration disregards party or sectional lines in meteing out that justice and protection which the humblest citizen has a right to expect at the hands of the representative of a great and free people.

It has been well said, Mr. President, by a distinguished hero of our own navy, that "blood was thicker than water," and the truth of this maxim is attested by the universal sympathy of the whole North for the South at this time of our extremity, not only as shown by the spirited editorials denouncing the carpet-bag rule in the South, which appear in every respectable journal of the North, and the letters of our Northern brethren who visit the South to investigate for themselves, but in the earnestly expressed opinions of every public man, in and out of Congress, whom I have met or corresponded with. All, like yourself, sir, are in full sympathy with us, and earnestly desire our restoration to that equality in the Republic, and that form of Republican government which would enable them, should they wish, or their children, to locate in South Carolina, without that degradation which now humiliates us, feeling, with true American hearts, that the flag of our Union is to be an emblem of fraternal unity and equality among the citizens of every State, and not of sectional hostility or carpet-bag domination. Foremost in this generous sympathy, I would name Charles Sumner, the consistent, the constant, and successful advocate of the freedom and political equality of the colored man. Sir, our hearts are softened, and our sectional, party, and personal prejudices are subdued, if not eradicated, when we contemplate with sorrow the departure of that

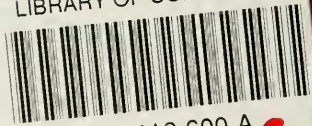
illustrious New England Senator, who has just passed away from the sphere of his usefulness in the very zenith of his national reputation; whose life of integrity and zeal, in a stern, and, at times, unpopular advocacy of his own peculiar political doctrine, has been marked by an independence of thought and action, which, however much many of us have hitherto differed from him, challenges our respect, and in his disregard of public clamor or the blandishments of legislative temptation, stands singularly prominent in these times of demagoguism and official depravity. The South, Mr. President, has reason to appreciate sympathy in her fallen fortunes, and honesty in her impoverished condition, and hence the tear of gratitude and of heartfelt sorrow irresistibly falls on the graves of such men as Horace Greeley and Charles Sumner.

This mutual interchange of respect, sympathy, and good-will between the North and the South is grateful to the heart of every patriot. Small prejudicial minds of both sections may attempt to deprecate the coming era of good-will which converts our hearts into one homogenous national unity, overleaping State lines, sectional or party dissensions, and, as a Greeley and a Sumner now find places in the gratitude of the Southern heart, so, Mr. President, in time will Lee and Stonewall Jackson be regarded, with yourself, among the military heroes of our common country.





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